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MAG

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Support

SUBJECT: Agency Esprit

1. MAG has conducted a modest survey of employee attitudes to determine if there is an Agency-wide esprit or morale problem. In addition to informal surveys by the MAG membership, the views of a number of Junior Officers Groups were solicited. This paper addresses those topics which we considered central to the question of esprit, provides our assessment of Agency morale today, and recommends management action to improve esprit or counter declining morale. As a result of this effort to determine Agency esprit, MAG has arrived at the following general conclusions:

A. There is no fundamental Agency-wide morale problem today, but there are isolated components with significant morale problems.

B. Esprit is not a generational question. The basic frustrations of junior officers are shared by senior personnel.

C. In order to ensure that there will not be a morale problem in the future, Management must recognize and respond to the near unanimous attitude among young professionals that meaningful contribution at a reasonable salary is mandatory and that "make work" at any salary is unacceptable.

2. The single most important factor which determines morale is the individual's concept of the usefulness of the Office or Division product. There is considerable feeling within the analytical components that the Agency has suffered a loss of

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impact with those officials who make national policy. This feeling is accompanied by a decline in the sense of involvement and degree to which an individual feels his activity is truly meaningful. This sense of involvement and contribution offsets any number of less fundamental concerns and explains the high morale overseas and high morale anywhere during times of crisis. A significant number of Agency professionals are passing through an identity crisis. They question the existence of an Intelligence profession and there is some desire for a Professional Association (a concept which has some support within MAG). The fact that the Agency's product is being utilized and is having an impact should be communicated to the individual by every practical means.

The second morale determining factor is responsibility. Individuals are looking for responsibility at an earlier age and seek opportunity for more interesting and challenging work. The obvious lack of career planning and the inability to move within offices or between Directorates is of concern to many officers.

It is accepted that promotion headroom is less today than in years past. Although many people feel that they have been treated fairly and feel that promotion headroom does exist for truly qualified personnel, many others hold the opposite view. MAG is unable to quantify percentages on either side of this question.

Esprit is directly affected by the competence of the immediate supervisor, too many of whom are characterized as poor and uninterested. One aspect of this question is top down communications which are considered in general to be marginal. In a related area there is considerable evidence that most individuals are aware of the mission of the Agency and their Directorate. However, the individual sees little evidence of reflection on the part of senior management on near term goals or on how to measure progress against specific goals. The extent to which the individual's view of senior management affects esprit is not clear. It is clear, however, that a more "visible" senior management group will have a positive effect on esprit.

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3. The following are specific recommendations for management action. MAG does not feel that the Agency is seriously deficient in all areas identified below. However, given senior management initiative and long-term commitment, significant improvements are possible and practical.

A. Every opportunity should be taken to make the Deputy Directors and Office Directors more visible. Their infrequent appearances at award ceremonies or yearly "open house" is always of benefit. It is recommended that once a year each Deputy Director, speaking to as large an audience as possible, articulate the goals and objectives of the Directorate. To make this means of vertical communications more effective, Office Directors and Division Chiefs should interpret the Directorate goals into Office and Division goals.

B. Management should seriously address the question of productivity. One aspect of this is identification of marginal activities. Consideration should be given to providing a method whereby any employee can suggest marginal activities to be eliminated or curtailed.

C. It is suggested that where morale is a serious problem, it is the result of poor or incompetent management. MAG believes that such conditions can be easily identified. The immediate solution to such problems is replacement of the manager--often a painful decision. For the long term, MAG recommends that only those individuals who demonstrate a competence for management be promoted into management positions. The brilliant analyst who has no supervisory skills or interests will not necessarily make a good and productive manager. Such an individual can be rewarded throughout his career by such means as the "Scientific Pay Scale" used in DD/S&T. A second recommendation leading to better management is that management training be provided for supervisors.

D. Managers at every level must be reminded of their basic responsibility to ensure that subordinates can relate individual contribution to the goals of the Office or Directorate.

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E. Some of our most important work is accomplished in a crisis atmosphere. When there is emphasis on meeting deadlines, the quality of the product necessarily suffers. It is recommended that component performance during crises be closely critiqued so that the most disciplined approach to management during crisis can be found.

F. The need for vertical communication is particularly acute in the Clandestine Service because of the very nature of its activities and the need for compartmentation. Specifically, the Officer returning from overseas is the one most in need of a better perspective of how the Clandestine Service fits into the government structure. An OTR course similar to the now cancelled "CS Review" should be considered as a means of providing this perspective.

G. Rotational assignments and transfers between Directorates for individuals with promotion potential should be made easier.

H. Every effort must be made to match the qualifications of the individual to the requirements of the job. The frustration of "over qualified for the job" is real.

4. The Agency justifiably prides itself on its professional qualities. These qualities generally ensure that the work gets done and done well. This high degree of professionalism can also serve to mask the degree to which an incipient problem may be becoming an issue that requires remedial action. There are perhaps some Agency wide policies and procedures which if changed would boost the average level of morale. The more difficult task is to tackle this question in the face of policies and procedures which for good reason cannot be changed. The key to the more subtle question of esprit is the degree of commitment to positive action by top level management. Action can and should be taken at all levels of management. If one accepts that esprit is a problem, such action will serve to counter declining morale. If one holds the view that

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esprit is not a problem today or for the future, then the same action will serve to improve morale above its currently "acceptable" level. The feeling that morale is a problem is contagious and if such an attitude is not countered, morale will become a problem.

Management Advisory Group

cc: Executive Director -  
Comptroller

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